

LCQ6: Population policy

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Leung and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (January 8):

Question:

Quite a number of studies and views have pointed out that Hong Kong needs to increase its population in order to become a megacity under the national standards on city size, thereby supporting sustainable socio-economic development as well as enhancing competitiveness; the Chief Executive also highlighted the need to increase the population in a media interview earlier on. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has set targets for increasing the population; if so, of the details (including the targets and implementation timetable); if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it has estimated, based on the finalized report of "Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030", the population that Hong Kong can accommodate after 2030 having regard to the overall spatial planning, land and infrastructure development; whether it will conduct new studies in the future to update the planning for the further expansion of the city's capacity; and

(3) as there are views that Hong Kong's population needs are already different from those outlined in the "Population Policy – Strategies and Initiatives" in 2015, whether the authorities will include the population policy as a major and priority task and set up a high-level cross-departmental team to comprehensively review and holistically consider the population policy, so as to achieve the then target of "review of effectiveness and timely adjustment"; if not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Population structure is closely related to the societal development. The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) compiles new population projection every five years to determine Hong Kong's population scale at various times of the projection period, which provides a common basis for various planning works of the Government. Hong Kong's population was over 7.50 million in mid-2024, and according to the latest projection, may reach 8.19 million in 2046. Excluding foreign domestic helpers, the number of elderly persons aged 65 and over is projected to increase to 36 per cent of the population. The labour force participation rate will also gradually decline from approximately 55 per cent in 2023 to around 52 per cent in 2046.

To address the challenges brought by changes in the population structure, and continuously align with and promote the long-term development of Hong Kong, comprehensive planning is required across various policy areas, including economic development, infrastructure development, education and training, youth development, housing supply, labour and welfare, medical services, community support, and childcare services, etc. Under the leadership of the Chief Executive, policy bureaux are performing their respective duties with cross-bureau collaboration, and formulating and implementing various population-related policy measures in response to the latest social and demographic conditions.

In consultation with the Development Bureau (DEVB), my reply, on behalf of the Government, to the question raised by the Member is as follows:

(1) Hong Kong's success owes much to its manpower which provides impetus for the city's social and economic development. The promotion of population growth provides the manpower required for the long-term development of Hong Kong and to continuously enlarge the local talent pool.

According to the 2023 Manpower Projection released by the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) in November last year, the local manpower demand is projected to rise from 3.55 million in 2023 to 3.75 million by 2028. However, as the local population ages rapidly, the supply of local manpower would fall short to fill vacancies across sectors in the next five years, resulting in a widening manpower shortage. As such, the Government will step up efforts to nurture local talents and unleash local workforce on the principle of safeguarding the employment priority of local workers. Outside talents would be admitted at an appropriate scale. The Government has implemented a series of proactive talent attraction measures since end-2022. As at end-2024, over 430 000 applications were received under various talent admission schemes, with over 270 000 approved. More than 180 000 talents under various talent admission schemes have arrived in Hong Kong with their dependants, reversing the decline in the local labour force during the pandemic and effectively replenishing the population and manpower shortfall. The LWB is gradually taking forward a series of reform measures in talent admission as announced in the 2024 Policy Address and continue to attract and support more high-quality talents to settle in Hong Kong, so as to underpin Hong Kong's development into a high value-added and diversified economy.

(2) According to the DEVB, the final report of the "Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030" (Hong Kong 2030+) released by the Government in 2021 has recommended to provide around 7 300 hectares (ha) of land over 30 years up to 2048, so as to meet the demand of around 6 200 ha of land over the same period and build a land reserve in the long run. In estimating the demand of land, Hong Kong 2030+ has taken into account the relevant policies, including the 14th Five-Year Plan, the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy, as well as industry-related policies. Reference has also been made to the then latest population projections of the C&SD.

In coming up the land demand in the coming 30 years, Hong Kong 2030+ has

already taken into account the land required for accommodating around one million new housing units. These housing units would be able to cater for the growth in domestic household, redevelopment needs of ageing buildings, as well as the needs of the mobile population, etc. As the land supply target set by the Government is beyond the estimated demand, there would be flexibility to expand the capacity of our city having regard to the actual development needs. The aforementioned quantum of land will still be able to cope with the high population projection of 8.96 million in 2046 as estimated by the C&SD. The quantum of land as recommended by the Hong Kong 2030+ would be sufficient to cater for different scenarios, including the one to expand capacity to attract more population as suggested by the Hon Leung. The buffer could not only enhance our capability to respond to future demographic changes, but could also be transformed into spaces that could be directed for improving our quality of life.

It is considered unnecessary at this stage to conduct another round of study on the long-term land use planning, but the Government will continue to closely monitor the development trends of our country, the surrounding areas and Hong Kong itself, and make timely review as needed.

(3) All initiatives outlined in the Report on "Population Policy – Strategies and Initiatives" published in early 2015 have been fully implemented and subsumed under the portfolios of various bureaux as part of the ongoing policies. The relevant bureaux will from time to time review the implementation and effectiveness of the initiatives under their responsibilities, and make timely adjustments in the light of factors such as social and demographic changes. As mentioned in the preamble of this reply, the population policy straddles a wide range of policy areas. Chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, the Human Resources Planning Commission (HRPC) consolidates resources and efforts of the Government and various sectors to examine, review and holistically co-ordinate policies and measures on human resources, including issues pertaining to the population policy, with a view to furthering the development of a high value-added and diversified economy in Hong Kong. The HRPC is a high-level policy platform, with eight policy secretaries, the Government Economist, the Commissioner for Census and Statistics and the Chairmen of three major training and qualifications-related bodies as ex-officio members; and non-official members drawn from a diverse mix of experts and stakeholders from different fields and sectors. Since its establishment in 2018, the HRPC has looked into a number of issues to tackle the demographic challenges. The in-depth discussions between HRPC non-official members and relevant bureaux and departments on various topics have facilitated the Government in formulating and refining their policies and measures. Currently, the Government has no plan to establish a separate high-level inter-departmental group specifically for population policy.